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U.S. View of the Podgorny Affair

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Washington—The top intelligence officer in the United States believes the recent ouster of Soviet President Nikolai Podgorny is a sign that the Soviets want to make their bureaucracy "more efficient."

Adm. Stansfield Turner, the director of the Central Intelligence Agency, said in an interview last week that he believed Podgorny's political demise was caused by his opposition to the new Soviet constitution, which gives government leaders new authority to make changes in the Council of Ministers. The change was supported by Party Chairman Leonid Brezhnev, who then assumed the position of head of state—president—in place of Podgorny.

"It may be that they want to take a more flexible approach," Turner said. "I sincerely believe that their combination of a bloated bureaucracy and falla-

cious philosophy is causing them considerable problems of inefficiency in their economy. This may be an indication they want to do something about it."

Turner also said the move increases Brezhnev's power. "The fact is that Brezhnev now has a foot in two of the three major places of power," the CIA director said. Brezhnev is head of the party and president, while Alexei Kosygin remains prime minister but, Turner said, in a subordinate role.

President Carter was briefed on the CIA interpretation for the first time on Wednesday, Turner said. The agency had been criticized by top-level White House aides for not alerting the administration to the struggle inside the Kremlin and for a long delay in analyzing what it meant.

"We would like to have done better and there are ways that we can do better in the future," Turner said. "But we are dealing in one of the most difficult areas of intelligence. Missing that is

not one of the things that panics me a great deal."

Turner said that under the old Soviet constitution the government ministers, who are similar to U.S. cabinet members, could not be replaced easily or have their departments changed. "They were sort of graven in marble," he said. "I look at [the adoption of the new constitution] as a fairly significant change, opening up the possibility of some shift in the bureaucracy of the Soviet Union, a shift to make the bureaucracy more efficient." There are 80 departments in the Soviet government and some ministers have held their positions for 20 years or more.

Turner explained that the Council of Ministers, headed by Kosygin, under the new constitution will be directly subordinate to the Presidium, which Brezhnev, as president, currently heads. "And there is now a specific provision that the ministers can be changed . . . on the recommendation of the council and approval of the Presidium . . .," Turner said.

He said a key question was whether Brezhnev, even with his increased power, would have the clout to take on the ministers. "And also whether his health is good enough for him to be in power long enough and vigorously enough to do this. These are things we will watch in the coming months," Turner said.

Another high-level administration analyst of Soviet affairs said the Podgorny ouster was not anticipated because Brezhnev and Podgorny had been quarreling and disagreeing over policy for years without a change in their offices. "In fact, we kind of thought of them as the Sunshine Boys—you know, the old vaudeville team played by George Burns and Walter Matthau," the analyst said. "They fought and sniped and got on each other's nerves for years but they always managed to tolerate it. But I guess it finally got to the point where Brezhnev could take Podgorny no longer."